

Submitter: Daniel Fisher  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure: HB2646

I am a board certified psychiatrist with 40+ years experience in community psychiatry and was on the faculty of U. Mass Medical School, Worcester, Mass. I am opposed to bill HB 2646 because it will create more harm than good. Mental Health First Aid was a well intended education program, but instead of encouraging young people to seek mental health services it will drive them away. Young people are very conscious of peer opinion and by teaching students and faculty to describe adolescent issues in diagnostic terms, these young people will experience increased stigma and discrimination. Furthermore, by describing issues in diagnostic terms, the sources of the problem are implied to be within the brain of individual child. This increases a sense of shame. This description also leaves the child feeling damaged, often for life. These injuries to their sense of self isolate and disempower them, whereas they need a sense of self esteem and agency to negotiate the developmental milestones they face. This series of traumas can push young people towards suicide and violence. Rather than teaching MHFA I would recommend a non stigmatizing approach called Emotional CPR (eCPR) ([www.emotional-cpr.org](http://www.emotional-cpr.org)). eCPR teaches community members how to connect with and empower other people in a way that restores their sense of investment in their lives, which we call revitalization. eCPR is pragmatic and non clinical. It does not label persons with diagnoses, but instead is trauma informed. eCPR also builds community as it is practiced in a group, thereby normalizing distress.